

## **Turism Blong Yumi Evriwan – Case study summary**

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this case study is to identify the contribution New Zealand volunteers make to indigenous tourism development in Vanuatu, and reflect on lessons learnt. Since 2009, VSA has sent ten volunteers to support local communities working on local tourism initiatives. These tourism development assignments are complementary and cumulative. Individual activities and contributions have an immediate impact and, with VSA's wide range of partner organisations, will collectively contribute to longer-term sustainable development across the country. The volunteer contribution to tourism development remains in its infancy, and this study aims to examine it in this context; exploring five key research questions: Why was the Vanuatu Tourism Development Volunteer Programme established and what were the objectives? What volunteer assignments have been undertaken, and where? What results and impact has the programme achieved? What are the lessons learnt from this research project? What conclusions can be drawn of the work of VSA volunteers in tourism development in Vanuatu? The case study is an in depth exploration of the impact that these assignments have had over this time and attempts to reflect and learn lessons for VSA's work in tourism development.

This case study is the product of collaboration between valued Partner Organisations, Ni-Vanuatu tourism operators, several volunteers and VSA staff. We trust that this study contributes to VSA's declared intention that "*VSA works alongside people in the Pacific... contributing the skills and energy of New Zealanders to achieve locally identified, locally relevant and locally delivered development.*" (VSA, 2011a)

### **Findings:**

The findings have been categorised into three broad themes: conversation of cultures, development ownership, and economic development. These themes explored the context of the volunteers' work, some of the challenges within the assignment, and the overall contribution made in each area.

#### *Conversation of cultures*

The nuances and conversations of culture envelop the everyday life and work of each volunteer. Tourism is an industry permeated by the management of cultural difference. While the volunteer perspective can be a catalyst in business development, it can also be a barrier to effective relationships and requires sensitivity and patience. This cultural dialogue can be complex, yet it is also essential to the effectiveness of the assignment, and these interactions between people represent the depth and value of volunteering for development.

#### *Who owns development?*

One of the main goals of VSA is to enable communities to manage and own the development that takes place in their communities. This case study explores varied development objectives and understanding within Ni-Vanuatu communities. Tourism is such an overwhelming driver of development, its interaction with a large international tourist and investor market leads to several challenges to indigenous development desires. VSA volunteers have worked hard with

the local providers to ensure this development is managed by, and in the interests of, local communities.

### Economic Development

While subsistence may dominate the daily life of many Ni-Vanuatu communities, economic development is a present need for the country as a whole. Economic development has many drivers and many challenges, and 'bisnis' in Vanuatu is never straightforward. VSA's work in the productive sector is not to create economic development within a vacuum, it is to create economic resilience and to create communities that can benefit from and manage the economy that is built. Developing tourism businesses has proven to be an effective way of creating a Ni-Vanuatu economy that is profitable, sustainable, and locally driven.

### **What were the lessons learnt from this research?**

Five key lessons have been identified. These lessons have been drawn from evidence-based research and by reflecting on development practice. They can be used to inform VSA's future practice in other settings.

#### Lesson one: Private, public, and civil society sectors all contribute to productive outcomes

VSA has been working innovatively in delivering effective volunteering for development with a greater focus on economic development outcomes. An important learning from this case study is that private enterprise, public services, and civil society organisations can all contribute to productive economic development outcomes - *turism blong yumi evriwan*.

VSA volunteer assignments have two main outputs: to strengthen the capacity of local organisations, through coaching and mentoring staff, and to build the skills of local people, through the delivery of training programmes. VSA's primary partner in tourism development in Vanuatu is the Department of Tourism, and its provincial offices. VSA made a strategic decision to work primarily with a government department, building public sector capacity while also delivering training to private sector operators.

While volunteers endeavour to deliver the best training they can with local business operators they continually need to ensure that the Department of Tourism staff are capable of performing those tasks themselves. While the outcome of these volunteer assignment's are a thriving tourism industry based in the private sector, in Vanuatu it is essential to ensure the public sector has the capacity to ensure this is possible, and that traditional communities are also engaged.

#### Lesson Two: Putting local people first is a key development principle

The findings of this case study have reinforced our understanding of the development principle of 'putting local people first'. Listening to the voices of our partner organisations reminds us of these values and important development principles. Volunteering is always, at its heart, about people. The relationships volunteers develop become the driving force behind any effective volunteer programme. Partner organisation staff are often confronted with the reality of working

side by side with a New Zealander for two years. Volunteers often spend months building relationships and understanding the community before making any interventions. This investment in relationships becomes essential for effective outcomes in the future.

#### *Lesson Three: One size does not fit all*

International development practice requires practitioners to take the unique context of each project or programme into account. We have relearned the lesson that each volunteer brings a particular mix of skills and knowledge to their assignment and that the axiom, 'one size does not fit all' applies. Six of the ten tourism volunteers working in Vanuatu had identical assignment descriptions, in practice each volunteer made the assignments their own, building to their individual strengths, complementing each other, and adapting to unique requirements on the ground. VSA's strategy in Vanuatu tourism development allows assignments to develop organically, in accordance with individual volunteer backgrounds, thereby using volunteer's skills to their full potential.

#### *Lesson Four: Working together works best*

The Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness (2005) requires development partners to 'align' and 'harmonise' their programmes. In line with VSA's core principles of partnership and collaboration, and reflecting international best development practice, the greatest successes of VSA volunteers have been realised when a collaborative approach has been taken - when people work together. VSA, and the individuals who become volunteers, play to their strengths. New Zealand has a particularly strong tourism industry and therefore world-class expertise in the area. This programme also highlights the VSA approach of aligning their work alongside the New Zealand Aid Programme, whose investment in tourism development can achieve systemic change while VSA works at the grassroots, adding value to both of our programmes. When partnered with others with similar goals and different areas of strength, results are increased and expanded.

#### *Lesson Five: Working cross-culturally - good things take time*

Paying close attention to communication between and within cultures and taking the time to understand and respect cultural boundaries are essential for positive development outcomes. Cultural and social development, and education, are important foundations for economic development outcomes.

Many volunteers are initially frustrated that the pace of progress is much slower than at home. This simply reflects cross-cultural differences, rather than differences in capability. This can mean slower progress, but also steadier and more sustainable progress. For volunteers to be successful they must first focus on relationship building, establishing rapport, and understanding the different motivations of those around them

In aiming for sustainability, all business development that takes place must be rooted in, and accepted by community values. If this is observed, VSA assignments can have lasting positive effects well after the programme has ended.

### **Final Comment and Recommendation**

During the last two years, Volunteer Service Abroad has increased its focus on volunteer assignments that lead to economic development outcomes in the productive sector. This shift of focus is illustrated by the work on indigenous tourism development in Vanuatu that has been examined in this case study.

This work has been completed alongside an increasing focus on Economic Development within the New Zealand Aid Programme. Within Vanuatu, this focus has led to support for the growing tourism sector. VSA, its partners and volunteers have worked alongside the broader donor funding to create a collaborative and effective economic development programme that works for local communities.

The research has demonstrated that volunteer assignments can and do make a useful contribution to economic development outcomes through working in partnerships with private enterprises, the public service, and civil society organisations, and that tourism development in Vanuatu belongs to all Ni-Vanuatu.

The research has also demonstrated clear links between economic development, social and cultural development, education, and environmental sustainability outcomes in Vanuatu.

The findings of this case study affirm the values and principles that underpin VSA volunteers' development practice. Putting local people first, working collaboratively across a range of sectors and agencies, treating each assignment as unique, and taking time to understand the local context and culture are all important lessons gained from this qualitative research exercise. This case study examined the work of a small number of volunteers over a relatively short period of time. The results to date are encouraging and lead to the recommendation that VSA should continue to expand volunteer assignments in the tourism sector in Vanuatu and to maintain the efforts to monitor and evaluate the progress of development outcomes.

In conclusion, the writers acknowledge with gratitude the local people, volunteers, and others interested in tourism development in Vanuatu who participate in this study and who are working hard each day to ensure that in Vanuatu *turism blong yumi evriwan*.

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